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FRENCH UNDERGROUND

I. Organization and Politics

The French underground consists of a number of groups engaging in a wide range of activities including occasional propaganda, publication and circulation of periodicals, fomenting of non-violent resistance of various types, organization of secret armies, and sabotage. Estimates of the numbers of people involved must be treated with caution because it is sometimes not clear whether they include only active militants or both militants and sympathizers.

Underground movements may be classified in three main groups: the resistance groups which had no existence before the occupation, old political parties gone underground, and labor unions gone underground. There is also important resistance activity on the part of Catholics, but this is unlikely to take a militant turn. All shades of political opinion find representation in one or another of the underground groups. These groups have, for the time being, sunk whatever political differences they may have in the common endeavor to rid France of the German occupation. While strictly French political differences have been relegated to the background, it is false to assume that members of the underground are blind or indifferent to everything except ousting the Germans. They watched the proceedings in North Africa with considerable apprehension and discouragement. Similar

political tactics in the initial area of landing in France might result in alienation of the underground, with some groups staying underground to resist the Allies as they resisted the Germans. The underground groups are unanimous in supporting de Gaulle as the symbol of resistance, and it is apparently largely through his efforts that unified direction has been supplied.

The Council or Committee of French Resistance, the unifying agency, is composed of seventeen delegates of the major underground groups -- with one representative for each of the Gaullist resistance groups, one for each of the old political parties (Socialist, Communist, Radical Socialist, Popular Democratic Party, Democratic Alliance, Republican Federation), two for the Confederation Generale du Travail, and one for the Catholic trade union federation (information as of June 1943). The French National Committee appointed the president of the Council of Resistance, and delegates of the Council have conferred in London with the Fighting French and the British. Relations between all of the component parts represented on the Council are not equally close. The Communists and Gaullists have established satisfactory working relations, not only at the top, but locally as well. The Socialists, on the other hand, distrust both Communists and Gaullists and hold themselves as aloof as possible under the circumstance of receiving financial assistance from the Fighting French.

At least part of the militant forces of the underground groups form a secret army. Its organization is apparently very loose. The army is probably composed of the militant units of groups which are components of the Council of Resistance, with the addition of groups like the outlaws in the mountains who seem not to have close connections with the other resistance groups. At any rate, it fuses the militants of the three largest resistant underground groups. Discipline must be loose, as secrecy of membership and cellular organization are the rule. One report has it that de Gaulle has appointed a general for the north zone (the old occupied zone), while Giraud has appointed a general for the south zone (the former unoccupied zone). Another report says these zone officers are major generals, and that brigadiers are in charge of regions. An individual apparently without connection with the underground says the head of each district is a colonel, with several captains under him.

Two types of militants are described in Free French publicity -- guerrillas and partisans. The former are men who maintain their normal activities, only coming together for specific operations. Partisans are full-time "guerrillas", living in hiding. Both take orders from a national military committee via local military committees. These committees include instructors as well as officers.

II. Numbers and Localities of Greatest Strength

While estimates of the number of members of resistance movements in France run to eight or nine million, most of these people are probably engaged in underground press publication and circulation, helping refugees to escape, and other such relatively non-violent activities. The number engaged in violent resistance is necessarily much smaller. Fighting French sources at the end of April put at 150,000 the number carrying on their usual activities but engaging in sabotage upon occasion (guerrillas). Of these British sources estimate that only about 35,000 are well-equipped. The secret army is said to number around 50,000. Centers for the latter are located in Compiègne, Léon-Epernay, Reims, Cotentin-Calvados, Nantes-Saint Nazaire, Vendée, and Lorraine in the north zone, and in Provence, the Riviera, Lyonnais-Dauphiné, Corsica, Clermont-Montluçon, Limoges-Périgueux, Languedoc-Béarn, and Hérault-Gard-Pyrénées Orientales in the south zone. The army in Languedoc-Bearn is 2,500 strong, and 2,000 strong in Hérault-Gard-Pyrénées Orientales. A representative of Catroux in the United States said in June that 500,000 troops could be produced if equipment could be supplied.

The most experienced in fighting of the militant underground groups is the "maquis", composed of persons who have gone into hiding in the mountains, especially in the Alps, to escape deportation to Germany. A large proportion of it probably consists

of demobilized army personnel. Estimates of the total number in hiding are sometimes as high as several hundred thousand. The best-substantiated figure for the Alps is about 10,000. Maquis groups have also been mentioned in the Vosges, the Pyrenees, the Massif Central, and Corsica. The movement into hiding seems to have started in the Alps in the spring of 1943, and it is unlikely that any of the other groups are larger than the first one. The movement was, to all indications, spontaneous, not being initiated by any of the existing underground groups. Nor, so far as is known, has any group succeeded in assuming leadership, although military officers direct it. Reasonably exact estimates of its strength and the location of the men are possible because of a statement of equipment needs which it sent to Giraud in July. Complete equipment is required for:

1,500 in Savoie

2,500 in Haute Savoie

1,000 in Hautes Alpes

1,000 in Drôme

2,000 in Isère

400 in Rhône.

These figures give a total of 1,400 unarmed or ill-armed men in the mountains west of the Rhône and 7,000 in the Alps east of the Rhône. Presumably the maquis groups have sufficient equipment for some of their members, so the total personnel is probably greater than the figures just given. While the weather remains mild the

numbers will hold out, but with the coming of winter many will be forced down into the valleys where their position will become exceedingly dangerous.

Principal headquarters of the resistance movements in southeastern France are at Lyon. The regions of Grenoble and of Cannes are positively known to be directed from there. Marseille, with its strong communist element, has produced communist mobile fighting groups headed by one Brulstein, alias Gilbert. Some of these groups are motorized, and they contain 300 fully armed men.

It is reasonable to expect that sympathizers not now militant may become so after a landing has been accomplished and they have been given arms. Any estimate of potential recruits must take into account the numbers of men deported by the Germans. Probably around two million Frenchmen (the figure includes some women) are in Germany as prisoners or laborers. A larger proportion has been taken from the north zone than from the south zone. Because France until the Armistice had compulsory military service, most recruits in their middle twenties or older will have had some military training.

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III. Activities and Potentialities

Present activities of the underground groups include diffusion of propaganda, sabotage of German transport and communications, attacks on German headquarters and labor offices, and other measures calculated to hinder the Germans or bolster the morale of the French population. Upon invasion such operations could be intensified and a general strike might be developed, paralysing transport, communications, public services, and production. A directive issued by clandestine newspapers indicates that just such measures are planned. The armed nuclei already established are to rally other patriots, issue arms to them where arms are available, and proceed to destroy German communications and supply lines. One of their most important tasks will be to fight the collaborationist militia set up to prevent help to the Allies and, if possible, to eliminate this militia. The maquis group in the Alps will undertake, if equipped, to perform definite military assignments--to hold the Alpine passes for a few days, or to control the Alpine region by a rear-guard action on the main routes of communication. To undertake either of these operations, however, it requires delivery of supplies ten days in advance of the day of landing, four days' advance knowledge of the proposed date, and support from air-borne forces as follows:

Echelon 1 — two companies of airborne troops each at Voreppe, Chambery, Sisteron, and Chindrieux; Echelon 2 -- if possible one

battalion of glider-borne or parachute troops at each of the above places and one anti-tank detachment for local reserve; Echelon 3 -- as strong as possible in heavy arms and equipment, to be landed in the region of Montmélian-Chambéry.

IV. Equipment Needs

None of the proposed activities can be carried out on an effective scale unless the resistance forces receive equipment from abroad. Some arms depots exist, collected from the most varied sources. In the Indre department the underground has in reserve a buried store which once belonged to the Cagoulards (a pre-war fascist organization). Some materiel was held out from that surrendered under the terms of the Armistice. Still other materiel has been obtained by raiding German and Vichy stores, and stores allowed to the French collaborationist groups. All these stocks are decidedly insufficient. In one place plans have been made to blow up vital railroad points, but no explosives are on hand. In the preceding section it was noted that the British estimated that only 35,000 out of 150,000 guerrillas were adequately armed. The shortage of guns is such that the loss of one issued by a resistance group to one of its members has been made punishable by death, according to the code to which each recruit gives his allegiance.

The maquis group in its early stages was supplied by truck from stores outside the mountains. For food and shelter it relies heavily on the peasant population of the district. The British began early to deliver supplies to the maquis group in the Alps, dropping guns, ammunition, and other equipment by parachute. This group has also used German AA guns and mortars, indicating that some of the more bulky supplies have been obtained by raids. A

most important contribution of the British has been medical supplies, which are scarce or completely lacking in all France. During March and April of 1943 twelve tons of such supplies were dropped. Unless Allied land forces are to reach the maquis group soon after the beginning of open warfare, much larger quantities of medical supplies will be needed for military operations.